

The front yard non-lawn.

Think about it. What do you really use your front yard for? In fact, do you even use your front yard? The typical answer... "The front yard is here to make the house look more appealing from the street." And the standard fall-back design has persisted: a patch of green grass surrounded by a few shrubs. That tired old "lawn" look is not very interesting, and certainly not viable (sustainable) in southern California's dry Mediterranean climate. It's a lot of work, water, fertilizer, chemicals and green waste transport, with no local habitat value. A big environmental negative. Not much return on your investment.

Consider the no-lawn alternative if you have not already. The front yard is a great place to start. If there are kids at home, you might be utilizing a back yard lawn for play, or you may need it for entertaining or for pets. For now, you could concentrate on improving your home by replacing just your front yard lawn with native plants for beauty and wildlife. Many people, after experiencing the workings of a mini-ecosystem in their own front yard, will extend their pleasure to the back yard, by reducing the size of the turf or eliminating it altogether. They replace boring shrubs with herb gardens, fruit trees, raised beds for veggies, and natives for habitat. They build attractive patios for entertaining. But that's another subject.

Let's start in the front for now. Get your camera, because the changes will be drastic.



CHOOSE A THEME.

Take into account the architectural style of your home, your growing conditions and soil type, the kind of mini-ecosystem you would like to see everyday. Do you have a favorite natural area? Is it a forest, a mountain meadow, the desert, a dry stream through chaparral, or a coastal bluff? Start by matching your house with your lifestyle and your likes. Whatever you envision, it will be unique to you and your house and will definitely make your whole neighborhood more interesting.



OUT WITH THE OLD.

Now this will get the neighbors' attention. Dig up the shrubs, kill the lawn, remove whatever cannot be turned into mulch, get it all down to bare earth. Address any drainage or soil concerns at this time. Make it a clean slate.

HARDSCAPE.

If you plan to improve old walkways or install new ones, build planters, a patio, deck, fountain, or birdbath, now is the time. Match the materials and style to your new garden theme.

IRRIGATION.

Presumably, if you had a lawn sprinkler system, it will not work well on the new landscape; wrong area, too much water, or improper heads. Tear it out. You can plan and install a new system, get the place ready for drip irrigation, or leave it without a permanent system.

IRRIGATION > MANUAL.

One of the most effective ways to water a habitat-style native plant garden is with a simple hose-end manually operated mini sprinkler. You just set it, irrigate a section, move it around bit by bit until you finish the whole garden, and store it away until its next use. If you plan on using manual irrigation, make sure you have hose bibs conveniently located to hook up the sprinklers.

IRRIGATION > AUTOMATIC.

You have many options if you desire a new sprinkler system, customized for your native plant garden. You can find



smart timers that will not operate during rainy periods and have features such as long intervals between irrigations, repeat run times, and other settings used specifically in drip and low volume irrigations.



NATURAL FEATURES.

Large boulders, rocks, fallen logs, branches, constructed ponds, springs and other components of your mini-ecosystem should be introduced before you start to plant the new landscape. You can build small mounds with imported soil such as decomposed granite, create dry streambeds, improve your soil with organic amendments, or alter the grade as you work to make the place look more “natural.”



PLANTS.

Fall through spring is the ideal season to plant natives. Select your plants according to your plan or idea and set them all out where they are to be planted. This way you can stand back, look at the whole picture, and make

any adjustments. Dig all the holes and plant as many as possible at once. This will make it easier to water them in, establish finish grade and rake out the surface. The clean up will give you a real sense of accomplishment.

SEEDS.

Easy to add any time in fall or winter, you can sprinkle an appropriate wildflower mix around the new plants and rake it in slightly under the surface. Be careful not to use too much. A little seed can go a long way. The spring flowers will be impressive. For native seed mixes available at Tree of Life, please look on our website:

<http://www.treeoflifenuresery.com/main/imagination/wildflowers.html>

MULCH.

As a finishing touch, you can top-dress the seed and tidy up the whole area with a half-inch layer of clean organic mulch. Avoid manure products. Use composted wood mulch, forest humus or leaf mold.



REWARDS.

Butterflies, hummingbirds, and other interesting pollinators will have proba-

bly discovered the plants the moment you began setting them out in preparation for planting. Many have spoken of such phenomena. You plant it and they will find it, even before it's planted! Every lawn conversion should include several species of flowering plants, such as milkweed and buckwheat that will accommodate specific butterflies; penstemon snapdragon, and chuparrosa for the hummers. The goal is diversity. Get rid of your boring lawn and plant a beautiful replication of natural California habitat appropriate for your area. The rewards are numerous; your house will look better than ever; your place will be the talk of block, and you'll probably notice the significant drop in maintenance costs, (primarily in that pesky water bill). You will quickly appreciate the sounds and songs of birds and soon forget the droning noise of the lawnmower. Your neighbors will probably follow your example and “sustainability” will be everyone's new buzzword.

For more information and resources on replacing your lawn, visit our website at <http://www.treeoflifenuresery.com/main/inspiration/no-lawn-yards.html>